

FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY FARMERS' MARKET:
A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of the local farmers' market is on the rise. Historically, food, especially food specific markets, has rarely been the focus of sociological inquiry. This research aims to fill this gap and explore the functions that farmers' markets play in communities, specifically in one market located in rural western North Carolina. Review of the literature identified five manifest, or intended market functions, and four latent, or unintended functions. Using these nine functions as a framework, responses from 60 survey-interviews and 40 online surveys from both customers and vendors were coded into predefined function categories. The results suggest that vendor participation in the markets is intertwined with personal financial reasons while customer participation is motivated by broader community goals. Collectively, all participants recognized the market as a fun, social experience as well as a community builder. This community, however, is not a proper representation of the larger surrounding community, indicating that the farmers' market may inadvertently be a site of class and racial exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of the local farmers' market is on the rise. Today, farmers' markets exist in every state in the country, in both rural and urban areas and reach millions of Americans every year. Farmers' markets, however, are not a new phenomenon and the idea behind direct producer to consumer markets is not a novel one. Farmers' markets as well as similarly structured markets have been around since the advent of merchant capitalism (Hinrichs 2000). The form of product relations utilized by these markets was the dominant form for centuries and it was only with the advent of industrialism and subsequent introduction of large-scale food production and long-range geographical food distribution that an alternative to direct markets began to take hold. However, as is the case with many of the societal changes that accompanied or followed the industrial revolution, it appears that American citizens are beginning to question the current dominant system of large-scale production and are actively seeking alternatives that more closely represent earlier market forms. They may have found just what they were looking for in the farmers' market.

Over the last two to three decades, farmers' markets have exploded into mainstream America. From the years 1991 to 2007, farmers' markets saw an almost 350 percent increase nationwide, awarding them the title of the fastest growing direct producer-to-consumer food venue in the U.S. food economy (Farmer et al. 2011). As of August 2014, the United States Department of Agriculture (2014) lists 8,144 markets across the United States tallying an additional 3.6 percent increase in the past two years. Farmers' markets have not only grown in number but have also experienced noticeable growth in sales volume and productivity.

The recent rise of the farmers' market has occurred concurrently with an upsurge of sustainable, environmentally friendly, and local food movements. These movements have varied goals and purposes, but they generally aim to support the production of wholesomely raised food from in and around a community in a way that does not hurt the environment and can be sustained over time. Integral to both these movements and the rise in popularity of the farmers' markets are what is referred to as the 'food elite'. This increasingly knowledgeable and consciously driven customer base puts more effort and thought into their food decisions and generally desires to know more about how and where their food is being produced, as well as its health aspects (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Members of this food elite, as well as a growing number of the general population, are now actively seeking the opportunity to purchase food directly from the farmer. In today's postindustrial society, farmers' markets are one of the few available options that provide this service while simultaneously providing an avenue to support small-scale farms, protect the environment, and foster community interaction and building. Most researchers agree that the recent success of farmers' markets is largely due to the manifold benefits, economic, agricultural and social, they provide to a community (Sharp, Imerman, and Peters 2002).

Nowhere are these food developments felt more than in the Southern Appalachia region. Despite national trends in farm loss, farming remains vital in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Western North Carolina alone is home to over 12,000 farms producing a wide range of products (Kirby, Jackson, and Perrett 2007). Of the 23 counties in this part of the state, 22 are classified as rural and for many residents, farming is a way of life as it has been for decades. Small farms predominate the region,

with more than half of all farmers operating on fewer than 50 acres. Farming is nonetheless a substantial contributor to the economy, with \$543 million in agricultural receipts reported in the region in 2002 (Kirby, Jackson, and Perrett 2007).

Over the past couple of decades, communities in Appalachia have experienced their own local food revolution. Recent trends find farms and farmers' markets increasing in number as well as a soaring demand for local food products (Haskell 2012). Current research shows that every county in the Appalachian region has either a farmers' market or has access to one in the area (Haskell 2012). It has not always been this way, however, and Appalachia farmers have displayed notable endurance despite broad economic challenges. Resultantly, regional farmers are proud of the area's agricultural history, which has deep roots in the local economy.

In Appalachia's agrarian history, direct farmer to customer markets have been the norm. If the necessary means didn't exist, farmers built local infrastructure to get their food to customers. They often utilized small farm and roadside produce stands that sold directly to customers as well as trucking products to wholesalers or grocery stores, doing most of the processing on their own (Haskell 2012). In the 1950's, smaller farmers' markets were staples in many communities. Today, these needs still exist, and many communities are rapidly developing the type of infrastructure to accomplish this in today's more sophisticated agricultural economy. One often-cited problem in local food distribution is how to get fresh, local food to the most rural communities and low-income parts of urban communities that may have little or no access to markets or grocery stores (Haskell 2012). Not only does the Appalachia region experience high agricultural numbers, but it also experiences high levels of poverty and food insecurity

(Appalachian District 2013). Many local organizations and initiatives strive to address these very problems.

As a whole, the Appalachia region boasts tremendous assets in agricultural heritage and local food economy including ongoing traditions of small farming and home gardening, vast regional food diversity, emerging infrastructure of farmers markets, a rich heritage of traditional food ways as well as craft, music, storytelling, literature, and customs related to food (Haskell 2012). Many see food produced in Appalachia as a regional treasure, and a 2011 study identified Appalachia as the most diverse foodshed in North America (Haskell 2012). In many areas, farmers' markets have become one locale for bringing together food and culture. Today, Appalachian North Carolina is one of the leaders in the region in development of local food systems (Haskell 2012).

The resurrection of the farmers' market in today's society presents several sociological conundrums. How have farmers' markets survived, much less thrived, in the recent economic downturns? Also, how have they done so in the face of corporate competition that provides cheaper goods? Do farmers' markets simply offer greater quality products, or do other auxiliary market functions exist that contribute to market success? What is it about farmers' markets that cause loyalty in their customers? What makes customers willing to pay premium prices for goods?

It is for these reasons that the farmers' market is such a ripe topic for empirical analysis. Historically, food, and especially food specific markets, has rarely been the focus of sociological inquiry in comparison to topics such as social inequality or social movements (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992). However, in a world of growing

global food insecurity combined with an ever-increasing population, the sociology of food is positioned to be a budding field. This study will highlight relevant concepts related to the sociology of food but will mainly focus on farmers' markets and their functions. The question this research aims to address is simple; what functions do farmers' markets play in communities? This question will be answered by examining the manifest and latent functions of the market from the viewpoint of the market, the vendors, and the customers. This research will serve to provide valuable insight into not only the upward trend of local farmers' markets, but also insight into the larger alternative food movement (Alkon and McCullen 2011).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sociology of Food

The study of food from the sociological perspective has only recently gained attention as a serious intellectual pursuit in the discipline. To the forefathers of sociology such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim, food seems only to be of a passing interest (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:2). However, various classical scholars have touched upon the subject of food in their work. Herbert Spencer was interested in the religious functions of food, such as food offerings and fasting, as well as believed that militant societies were based on the control of food supplies (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:2). Spencer also wrote briefly on food and the role of food laws in social inequality. Like Spencer, Georg Simmel was interested in the ceremonial uses of food, but viewed food more from a social significance perspective. Simmel emphasized the consequences of socialization, specifically that when norms are

introduced to food practices, it is possible for the result to be the 'aesthetic stylization' of the meal in which no importance is placed on the actual food, but rather on the appearance and ritual of the event (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:3).

Thorstein Veblen studied food and drink in the context of festive gatherings. Veblen drew attention to how consumption of certain foods provided distinction between classes and between man and women, specifically noting that in patriarchal societies food preparation historically existed inside the female domain (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:2). In line with Simmel and Veblen, David Riesman added that food not only had the potential of being used in display, but also that consumption of certain types of food could potentially become an indicator of privilege and social class (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:3).

The contemporary sociologist Pierre Bourdieu agreed, highlighting the use of food in distinction between classes, claiming that individual choice is highly predictable based on social background (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:11). Bourdieu differentiated between the common perceptions of the 'vulgar' tastes of the lower class and the more 'refined' tastes of the higher classes. Finally, Claude Levi-Strauss asserted that the cuisine of a society is the unconscious language of that society, of which study would allow for deeper understanding of the culture (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:9).

In summation, food is viewed differently from the three major sociological perspectives. Representing the symbolic interactionism perspective, Herbert Blumer recognized food and eating only as a system of images and symbols used in the decision-making process of consumption (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:4).

From the functionalist perspective, food and food practices symbolize patterns of social relations, namely how these relations necessitated human cooperation and sustained social structures (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:7). Lastly, the structuralist perspective recognizes that taste is acquired and dependent on cultural and social shaping. In general, structuralist work views food more for its aesthetic properties and separates the nutritional aspects of food from the aesthetic aspects (Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo 1992:7). Each perspective adds its own layers of complexity to the meaning of food.

Modern Contributions to Food Thought

Modern analysis of food and food practices spurred on by modifications to the national food system has led to the introduction of new theories into the field. Today, in the United States, food travels an average of 1,300 miles and changes hands multiple times before reaching its final destination, highlighting an extremely complex food system (Lacy 2000:19). If the food system is complex, the meaning of food is more so. With every setting change, food meanings change as well, each context with its own complex intricacies. The meaning of food, then, is dependent on these social situations. Delormier, Frohlich and Potvin (2009:218) write, “the social context [of food] can be understood as the local configuration of social relations which are comprised of social structures such as class, race, and gender; institutional practices, collective and individual behavior, and intersecting personal biographies” Food means different things to different people, in different places. When this concept is applied to the food

decision-making spectrum, there are two opposite ends reflecting opposing choice systems.

Food Decision-Making Spectrum

On one end of the spectrum are those who demonstrate extreme selectiveness in the food decision-making process. Included in this group are the previously mentioned 'food elite' as well as those more dedicated to supporting local food efforts. Commonly referred to in practice as 'eating local', supporters believe this practice allows one to connect with and feel responsible for their food and the area in which they live. Simultaneously, by purchasing locally grown food from farmers instead of from corporate food monopolies, supporters are able to promote both environmental sustainability and social justice as well (Ward et al. 2010). The choice to act in accordance to the principles of eating local may also have additional benefits in the form of shared identity and membership into cultural groups. Ward (2010) proposes that the consumption of local as well as organic food reflects a form of asceticism in which restraint exists in the form of extremely selective food preferences. He also suggests that ethical food consumers may be more 'obedient to consumerist rather than citizenly urges' (2010:349).

On the other end of the spectrum are those who make food decisions based on need and cost. This group is made up in large part of poorer, often racial minority group members. When food decisions are considered a personal choice, the realities of those who can only purchase based on need are overlooked and consequently, these groups are considered to not care about where their food comes from or how it was produced

(Alkon and McCullen 2011). This in turn leads to the view of the 'moral inferiority of the poor' and by extension the superiority of those who do care (Alkon and McCullen 2011:950). This perspective also ignores the fact that these lower income consumers are already spending a larger percentage of their incomes on food than those in higher classes (Alkon and McCullen 2011).

Recognizing the existence of differing food realities for different parts of the population exposes the role food plays in the reproduction of social constructs such as race and social class. In the same way as race and social class are constructed in other social practices, the practices of producing, selling, buying, and consuming food become racialized and classed practices (Slocum 2008). Alkon (2012) notes that food is unequally available based on hierarchies of race, class, gender, and national status due to the productions of its value according to social norms. It is also documented that the poor and racial minorities suffer the most from lack of access to healthy food (Macias 2008). Some assert that food shortages, even during times of famine, are not due to a general lack of food, but instead are due to a lack of rights to food that certain groups experience, as part of the economic, social, and political relationship bound up in food systems (Mennel et al. 1992).

Additionally, some scholars' claim there exists a link between social class and food preference and taste (Mennel et al. 1992). For example, middle class families have been found to view food according to scientific and nutritional aspects while working and lower class families view food in terms of outward appearance and function. Food quality is also stratified according to class with research suggesting that members of higher-classes have greater access to higher quality food while members of the lower

classes have greater access to mass produced and lower quality foods (Macias 2008). This suggests food may have become a form of cultural capital, contributing to the status of an individual as well as the construction of lifestyle (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000).

THE MODERN FARMERS' MARKET

Understanding the research surrounding food is the first step to dissecting the modern farmers' market. The next step is distinguishing what exactly makes a farmers' market a farmers' market. Essentially, farmers' markets exist to provide a space for the producer, either a farmer, craftsman, collector or preparer, to sell their products directly to the customers (Holloway, Lewis, and Kneafsey 2000:286). In the market, these producers, along with their family, friends, or employees, take the role of vendors. The majority of the products sold at the market are food items, produce, meat, baked goods, etc., with the highest earning vendors usually falling into these categories (Varner and Otto 2008:180). The most successful markets usually provide a wide range of products including but not limited to crafts, flowers, and/or specialty items. The farmers' market is most likely not the principal grocery shop for most customers but rather a supplementary shop for specific items or specific categories of items (Holloway, Lewis, and Kneafsey 2000:289).

Farmers' markets, more so the modern models than the original manifestations, are highly ordered spaces and thus can be highly bureaucratized (Holloway, Lewis, and Kneafsey 2000:295). This bureaucratization manifests itself not only in the physical layout of the market, but also in the policies upon which the market is based. Certain

guidelines on production practices, type of product, and pricing regulate the market and vendors must follow these rules to have space to sell. Most markets have a market director as well as a board of directors, made up of some of the more veteran vendors, and it is this group who determines the structure and organization of the market. Application and inclusion in the market can be a difficult process.

Farmers' markets share a strong sense of identity based in their host locations (Hinrichs 2000). Today, with the explosion of market popularity, markets now exist in rural, suburban, and urban areas as well. More rural, small town markets, are generally open one day a week, during the morning and early afternoon hours, and tend to have fewer vendors and lower average sales numbers (Varner and Otto 2008:176). Urban markets situated nearer to higher income residents report higher average sales with the largest and most successful markets bringing a farther traveling and higher spending customer base (Varner and Otto 2008:176,180). Research suggests that the highest earning markets exist in urban communities with a higher educated, higher earning, wider-ranging, and denser population (Varner and Otto 2008:181). That being said, each market is unique and idiosyncratic, regardless of location.

FUNCTIONS OF THE MARKET

The true complexity of the farmers' market is most evident when studying its functions. There are two categories into which the functions of the market can be grouped. The first category includes the manifest functions, or the accepted and acknowledged functions for the markets existence, as well as acknowledged reasons of

market participation. The second category includes the latent functions, or the unrecognized or ignored functions of the market.

Additionally, there are two perspectives from which the market functions can be viewed. The first perspective comes from the market itself, more specifically from those involved in the market including the market director, board of directors, and vendor group that contributes products to the market. The second perspective comes from the customer base, made up of a combination of community members, students, tourists, and seasonal residents. In some cases, a function may fall into the same category for both perspectives, such as a function being manifest for both the customer and the market. In other cases, a function may fall into opposing categories, such as a function being manifest from the view of the market and latent from the view of the customer. Specifically noted will be those functions that do not align from both perspectives. For this study, functions of the market will be labeled either manifest or latent based on the perspective of the market, although the customer perspective will be noted for each function as well.

Review of the literature identified five manifest market functions: (1) farmers' markets as economic machines; (2) farmers' markets as supporting small-scale farmers; (3) farmers' markets as places of direct interaction; (4) farmers' markets as community food sources; and (5) farmers' markets as environmentally friendly. Also identified were four latent market functions: (1) farmers' markets as community builders; (2) farmers' markets as fun, social experiences; (3) farmers' markets as sites of higher profit margins; and (4) farmers' markets as sites of privilege. Each function will be explained in depth in the following sections.

Manifest Functions of the Market

The first function of farmers' markets is to serve as economic machines that support the local economy (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Sharp et al. 2002; Hinrichs 2000). This function is recognized and accepted by both vendors and customers, and therefore is the first manifest market function. In today's society, markets serve as an alternative to the regional or even global food corporation monoculture that dominates modern economies. Many authors list this function as one of the primary benefits the market provides to a community (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Sharp et al. 2002). Alkon (2012) describes this by identifying farmers' markets as one way to maintain the economic life of a local community. These economic benefits do not end at the marketplace and have been found to spill outward into the surrounding community (Sharp et al. 2002). Although mostly seen as an alternative market, Hinrichs (2000:295) points out that farmers' markets, albeit a step in the direction of the decommodification of food, are still generally based in commodity relations in a similar way to larger scale operations. Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) echo this when they state that farmers' markets simultaneously subvert conventional food spaces while reinforcing free market entrepreneurialism. Relatedly, a second aspect of this function is the celebration of the local area surrounding the market. In many communities, the farmers' market serves as the premier example of what it means to support 'local' industry.

Tied in with the economic aspect of the market is a second market function of supporting small-scale, family farms and crafts (Hinrichs 2000; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000, Sharp et al. 2002). Like the first, both vendor and customer recognize this function and therefore it represents a second manifest market function. Farmers'

markets successfully fulfill this function by providing a safe place in which farmers can market their goods without fear of corporate interference. This is an extremely important function in the age of the 'death of the family farm' when small-scale farming is less and less viable in competing with larger scaled operations. These independent farmers now turn to farmers' markets to economically survive and make a living wage (Hinrichs 2000). Once established at the market, farmers can be assured of a constant and ever-supporting customer base on which they can test new products and receive instant feedback, a luxury not afforded to them in a traditional market place (Sharp et al. 2002). To the farmer, the purpose of the market is to ensure the survival of their farm: to the customer, the market is a space in which they can contribute to this effort (Hinrichs 2000:299)

A third identified function of the market is to provide a space of direct interaction between the producer and the customer (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). This market aspect is recognized and appreciated by both sides and thus represents a third manifest market function. The direct interaction present at farmers' markets is what distinguishes local food systems and serves as a notable marketing advantage for small-scale farmers (Sharp et al. 2002; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Hinrichs 2000). The opportunity for a direct relationship is what is appealing to the customers who for once have the ability to meet the producers of their food or products and question their growing practices and preparation techniques (Sharp et al. 2002). For some, the market may be one of the few places they feel comfortable having conversation with someone who is not family or friend (Slocum 2008). Overtime, repeated interaction between vendor and customer inevitably builds relationships that go beyond business, and

eventually friendship and trust develop: trust in the vendor to sell quality and fairly priced goods and trust in the customer to return back to the market. It is this personal trust that some see as the hallmark of direct agricultural markets (Hinrichs 2000). The concept of social ties modifying and enhancing economic relations is referred to in new economic sociology as social embeddedness and is especially relevant when examining food spaces such as farmers' markets (Hinrichs 2000:298). The basis for the argument of the embeddedness of food spaces lies in the direct personal encounters and mutual knowledge shared between parties (Hinrichs 2000). In their study of Iowa farmers' markets, Varner and Otto (2008) found that 85 percent of vendors considered the satisfaction they received from customer interaction and providing quality food to customers very important.

The aspect of providing quality food to the community is a fourth manifest function of the farmers' market in the eyes of both vendors and customers. Although some farmers cling to the market for survival, others have been found to be giving up material wealth in order to provide this service to their community (Pilgeram 2012). In some cases, farmers' markets represent the only access to fresh produce and therefore provide food security to communities in fresh-food deserts (Sharp et al. 2002). In these communities, farmers' markets are all the more important.

A fifth function farmers' markets provide that not only helps the local community but also has greater reaching effects deals with the environmental goals built into the ideals of the market. Alkon points out that it is the politically liberal atmosphere surrounding markets that brings environmentalism into the forefront. These goals are based on a handful of environmental principles, most notably ideas

such as buying closer to the site of production in order to eliminate transportation pollution and the use of environmentally healthy production practices. Since environmental goals are tied up in both the production practices of the vendors and the product preferences of the customers, this function is manifest for both groups.

Latent Functions of the Market

The first latent function that is consistent in literature on farmers' markets is the idea that these markets help build and strengthen communities. The empowered community is the center of local food systems, and farmers' markets specifically are viewed as community builders (Lacy 2000). Authors cite a variety of potential reasons for this phenomenon. Some note that farmers' markets are one of few social gathering places of vibrant social life where valuable connections are formed (Sharp et al. 2002; Alkon 2012). There, neighbors meet neighbors and bond over shared interests creating a sense of community opposite of urban anonymity (Alkon and McCullen 2011). To some, farmers' markets represent a movement back towards community bonding and serve as all-welcoming and peaceful sites of this type of action. In some cases, farmers' markets have even served to revitalize otherwise socially 'dead' areas and have transformed them into energetic community spaces (Pilgeram 2012; Sharp et al. 2002). Overall, farmers' markets are viewed as locations of community celebration (Slocum 2008:33) and are considered to strengthen the social fabric of the community, regardless of whether or not they actually serve this purpose (Sharp et al. 2002).

For the customers, the community building function of markets is an obvious manifest function. For the market, however, this function better fits in the latent

category, as the market was not explicitly designed as a community builder. That being said, on an individual and personal basis, many vendors do participate in markets with the intent of helping build community (Sharp et al. 2002).

A second latent function helps to explain one way farmers' markets build community. This function involves the social experiences that come with attending the market. For many customers, farmers' markets are just plain fun. Markets represent a place to bring the family or meet with friends, to grab a coffee or a baked good and enjoy the weekend (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). It's easy to see how farmers' markets then are spaces of intimacy, are strongly tied to the local places they represent (Hinrichs 2000; Slocum 2008), and are beloved places for both vendors and customers (Pilgeram 2012). For customers, the experience at farmers' markets tends to be more of an exploratory nature. Slocum refers to this concept as 'basket kicking', but notes this activity falls into the domain of those who have the time and no direct need to buy (2008:859). Another view posits the market space as a transgressive place of play, a production almost reminiscent of theatre complete with performance, spectacle, and laughter (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). This might explain why the often-rural feeling market is so attractive to urbanites, whose experience may represent a brief 'appropriation of the rural identity' (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000:294). In many cases, farmers' markets are seen as a snapshot of local culture and thus a tourist hub drawing in large numbers of people from outside of the community on a weekly basis (Pilgeram 2012; Sharp et al. 2002). When viewed from the perspective of the market, the fun social experience that is created when the market is in operation is not a direct goal of

the market and therefore from this perspective this function falls into the latent category.

Once the appeal of the market experience is recognized, a third latent market function can be identified. Some researchers have noted that farmers' markets and the goods sold there are a relatively expensive luxury (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). In fact, goods there can be more expensive, at times even much more expensive, than their grocery store competitors. The fact that markets are successful even with higher priced goods highlights this function of allowing for higher profit margins. There are a couple of suggested reasons why farmers' markets can get away with higher prices. First, when customers attend markets, they may be purchasing not only the goods for sale, but in a symbolic sense also buying into the experience and space as a whole (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Viewed from a different perspective, vendors at the market may be selling, along with their goods, the aura of personal and social connection, turning these features into an add-on commodity (Hinrichs 2000). In this view, the embeddedness of the market may be serving to add value to the products.

A second view suggests that ideas of the quality of the goods have become conflated with the ideals of locality and the context of the market (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Customers may implicitly assume that locally grown food is of higher quality than other options (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Slocum 2008). In addition, customers may attach personally meaningful ideologies to products based on their personal relationship with the producer or the mode of production. These sometimes conscious and other times unconscious decisions may allow customers to justify higher priced purchases.

Customers may also be buying into a third value-adding element. By purchasing according to ethical imperatives, customers may be acting in line with certain desired 'lifestyles'. This specific lifestyle recognizes these particular food items as cultural capital, therein consumption of these types of items aids in the "construction of identity in terms of status, distinction, and belonging" (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000:292). As evident in the recent history of the market and for whatever the reason, farmers' market customers are willing to pay higher prices for their goods (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). For various reasons, this function falls into the latent category for both the market and customers. The market, although dependent upon sales and very happy to raise profits, was not designed with higher priced goods in mind, although many involved may recognize this trend. Customers, on the other hand, do not participate in the market in order to pay higher prices for products.

The comfortability customers' exhibit with higher prices opens the door for the fourth and potentially most disturbing latent function of the market: farmers' markets as sites of privilege (Park 2013). Many view farmers' markets as all welcoming spaces that allow for interaction between diverse groups of people (Park 2013, Pilgeram 2012). Some even see farmers' markets as possessing the ability to accept people who are not accepted in mainstream society (Pilgeram 2012). The literature suggests, however, this is not always the case. Pilgeram notes that some people may feel more comfortable and fit in more easily at the market than other people (2012). Research has found that farmers' markets tend to serve a homogeneous population consisting of white, middle-aged, middle to upper class, college-educated whites often from metro areas or college towns (Alkon 2012; Freedman et al. 2011; Alkon and McCullen 2011;

Macias 2008). Markets, however, do not intend to serve only a segment of the population, and this is often antithetical to the values of market directors as well as those who participate in market activities (Pilgeram 2012). In fact, farmers' markets, as well as local food projects in general, may even aspire to serve a diverse population, but simply fail in their efforts to do so (Macias 2008). Thus, markets are exclusive not in design but in practice, a market function that is latent for both the market and the customers who attend it. There are a couple potential causes for this occurrence.

Market exclusion may first simply be due to price. Poorer community members may not have sufficient financial resources to accommodate for the higher prices sometimes found at the market, and therefore may have no option to participate in the first place. In addition to high costs, time and labor investment may also play a part in keeping people out of the market (Macias 2008). Compared to other quicker options such as frozen, fast, and microwaveable food, the preparation of homemade, locally grown produce can be a very time consuming activity. For some, spending an inordinate amount of time on this process is not realistic when other commitments are considered (Pilgeram 2012)

Market exclusion may also be due to a difference in ideals between market participants and groups absent from the market. A dominant assumption shared by market directors and members alike is that people who are interested in the market and what it has to offer will by their own power become involved in the market (Pilgeram 2012). What the market has to offer, however, may align with the affluent and liberal desires of the market demographic (Alkon 2012). Included in this category are common market goods such as organic foods and hand-made items as well as

certain types of vegetables and fruits that have developed a racialized meaning. The groups not represented at farmers' markets, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, immigrants, and other minority groups, may not share the ideals represented in the market's products and therefore feel less of a draw to the market. This misalignment of ideals and resultant group absence is believed by some to be due to a lack of education or concern in the members of these groups (Pilgeram 2012). In addition, immigrant populations are seen to not understand the 'close profitability' of sustainable farming and instead desire 'cheaply priced food' (Slocum 2008:858). These views end up reinforcing social inequalities.

The structure of farmers' markets may also play a role in their exclusionary properties. When considering the physical structure of a market, the seniority system employed by many markets allows for the veteran vendors, most likely white, to remain in the core areas of markets leaving newer members, more likely to be non-white, to be located on the outside areas if involved at all (Pilgeram 2012). Slocum (2008) notes that in some cases, there is even a noticeable spatial separation between white, middle to upper class people and more brown, working class people at markets. In extreme cases, poor and non-white populations may even become invisible in farmers' market spaces. When the racialization of food practices are considered, the market may inadvertently privilege people who meet certain normative practices and impair participation for those do not meet these criteria (Pilgeram 2012). These racial practices also serve to explain spatial properties of the market such as the gathering of racially identified people around some vendors and products rather than others (Slocum 2008).

The final major aspect when examining the farmers' market as a site of exclusion deals with the ideas of whiteness that in many cases have tied themselves to the market. Whiteness as a concept refers to an idealized image that includes space, market roles and actions, preferences, and lifestyles (Pilgeram 2012). Ruth Frankenburg stated that whiteness "carries with it a set of ways of being in the world, a set of cultural practices often not named as 'white' by white folks, but looked upon instead as 'American' or 'normal'" (Alkon and McCullen 2011: 940). One element of this whiteness is the ability to code a space as white, in a way racializing the space (Alkon and McCullen 2011). At the market this may manifest itself in customers comfort with more expensive products, white vendors, and political views similar to their own (Alkon and McCullen 2011).

The concept of whiteness, however, is only a segment of what is referred to as the 'white farm imaginary', or the romanticization of an agrarian narrative specific to whites (Alkon and McCullen 2011:945). In the white farm imaginary model, the farmer or local producer is likened to the small-scale, self-sufficient, family-supporting, American farmer of old. Since this farmer is white, the historical role of non-whites in American agricultural history is forgotten and their contributions and struggles in food production are overlooked (Alkon and McCullen). (In addition to race, the recognition of the male dominated heterosexual imagery may also normalize heterosexuality and gender roles at the market, excluding community members of different sexual orientation and females from full participation (Pilgeram 2012)). The whitening of the shared ideas of who grows the food may add another element to market exclusion and may provide an additional explanation as to why migrant farmworkers and non-whites

are absent from the market (Park 2013). Besides the white farmer imaginary, there may be a more general community imaginary surrounding farmers' markets, which may for some define which types of people are included in their community and which are not included (Alkon and McCullen 2011). If true, the racialization of the farmers' market could explain certain trends found to be present at markets.

It is clear the farmers' market is a complex entity. There are numerous concepts and ideas present in the literature that contribute to the body of theory surrounding food and farmers' markets as well as inform this particular study. Review of the literature on food theory allows for a deeper understanding of people's view of and actions surrounding their food. Most importantly, the identified manifest and latent functions of the farmers' market, although not termed so in the literature, provide the basis from which market functions can be recognized and coded in the data collected in this study. This study differs from existing literature in several ways. While the majority of the literature on markets speaks either to understand or analyze one or several functions of the market, this study aims to identify all manifest and latent functions, positive or negative, that farmers' market may exhibit. This study also takes into account both customer and vendor viewpoints, which is important if a complete understanding of the market is to be reached.

METHODS

This research study aims to pinpoint the functions farmers' markets play in communities through the identification of the markets' manifest and latent functions using four methods of data collection. First, data was collected through participant

observation at the Watauga County Farmers' market six Saturdays during the second half of 2014 market season, specifically in the months of September, October, and November. Observation sessions ranged from thirty minutes to two hours and occurred during the height of the season and end of the season as well. Observation sessions also differed in time with some occurring towards the opening of the market, around 8 a.m. and others occurring in the middle or towards the close of the market around noon. Sessions differed in order to experience the full range of market conditions. Shorthand notes were taken during observation, which ranged from conversation topics to mapping the market layout.

The second data collection method used in this study was sixty short face-to-face survey-interviews completed with both customers (n=30) and vendors (n=30). Supplemental to these interviews was a survey questionnaire, created specifically for this project, which gave structure to the interviews. Both questionnaires were crafted with the input of the Watauga County Farmers' Market Board of Directors, who asked to include specific questions that they desired answered on each survey. Interviews were conducted with one or two customers or vendors who answered the questions verbally as the results were recorded on the paper survey. Each interview lasted about ten minutes. For the closed-ended questions, responses were classified into the fixed answer categories by the researcher. Interviewees sometimes looked at the paper version to aid in their understanding of the questions and their possible responses. (See Appendices A and B for the survey instruments used.)

The survey-interview for the customers consisted of eleven questions, nine closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The majority of the closed-ended

questions were chosen to provide demographic measurements of the respondents, which included questions on age, income, sex, race, and education. The two open-ended questions were designed to identify functions of the market from the customer's perspective without giving any options for the respondent to choose from. Specifically, these questions asked why customers attended the market and what the market meant to them. The survey-interview for the vendors had a similar format and also consisted of nine closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The majority of the closed-ended questions were included per request of the Board of Directors and dealt with vendors experience at the market. The two open-ended questions served a similar purpose to those on the customer survey, which was to identify market functions from the vendor's perspective. Short answers were recorded by hand.

The third data collection method was an online survey emailed out from the market director to the list of customer emails that subscribe to the Watauga County Farmers' Market weblist. This survey was crafted as an end of season survey, and sought to better understand customer experiences and identify successes and failures in areas such as marketing from the previous season. Two open-ended questions were added to this online survey at the request of the researcher, which again aimed to identify market functions from the customer perspective. These online surveys were sent out at the end of the market season, approximately the month of December 2014, and responses were collected and organized in a document completed in February 2015.

The fourth data collection method utilized in this study was short, in person, non-structured interviews with the market manager that sought to provide further

insight into market functioning in areas such as market history, policy, structure, and day-to-day management. These interviews occurred three times, one in May, one in October, and one in March of the following year. Shorthand notes were taken during these interviews and were used to inform various sections of this paper. There were no obvious ethical concerns with this study and it received IRB approval for exemption from the Appalachian State IRB office on September 9th, 2014.

Sample

Due to time and scope restraints, all samples used in this study were non-probability samples of convenience. For the customers (n=30), purposeful quota sampling was used in an attempt to diversify the demographic of the sample. This sampling method used a quota of (n=10) for respondents in categories of students, senior citizens, and others and sampling was visually based. Customer samples were collected by approaching customers as they exited the market and asking if they would be willing to complete a short survey. Overall, of the thirty customers sampled, the average age was 41 with ages ranging from 20 to 67, 60 percent (n=18) were female, 96.7 (n=29) percent were white, 70 percent (n=21) lived in Boone, 50 percent (n=15) had a yearly household income at or above \$100,000, 57 percent (n=17) were community members, 27 percent (n=8) were students, 17 percent (n=5) were tourists or seasonal residents, and 100 percent (n=30) had at least some college experience.

For the vendor sample, vendors were chosen by convenience (n=30), which accounted for most of the approximately 40 vendors present on market days. Vendors were approached in a similar way, with only one vendor refusing to participate.

Demographics of the vendors were not collected in the same way as customers. Results found that the majority of vendors had been selling at this market between four and ten years, 70 percent (n=21) drove less than thirty miles to the market, and 70 percent (n=21) were satisfied or very satisfied with sales at the market. The online survey sent out by the market manager represented a third non-random sample as all customers subscribed to the email list were contacted (n=200) with a response rate of 18 percent.

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study included both qualitative and quantitative data. All data was collected and inputted into SPSS where descriptive univariate and multivariate analysis were conducted. Qualitative data from interview transcripts was analyzed using content analysis. Data was initially recorded by hand with the unit of analysis for both the customer and vendor surveys including both words and phrases and then categorized as manifest or latent. Definitions of manifest and latent functions were taken from Robert Merton's (1949:63) work titled *Social Theory and Social Structure*, in which Merton described manifest functions as the intended objective consequences of social action and latent functions as the unintended and unrecognized consequences of social action. Responses were further classified into the groupings previously defined in the literature. To assist in this coding, definitions of each function were developed.

Responses were classified as relating to either the manifest or latent function of the market if they resembled any of the following statements:

- **‘Economic Machine’**: supporting local economy, alternative to corporate competition, maintaining economic life in the community, celebrating local industry, or dealing with putting money back into the economy in any way
- **‘Supporting Small Scale Local Farms and Crafts’**: viewing the market as safe place for vendors to market goods, allowing vendors to economically survive and make a living wage, providing constant customer base, customers supporting small business survival, or helping vendors make money
- **‘Space of Direct Interaction’**: distinguishing local food systems, ability to meet producers of food and question growing practices, customers knowing where their food comes from, conversation, friendship with vendors/customers, trust built over time, and specific customer or vendor interactions
- **‘Providing Quality Food to the Community’**: giving up material wealth to provide service to the community, market as the only access to fresh produce, food security in community, or relating to the quality or freshness of market food and/or products
- **‘Environmentalism’**: dealing with market ideals, eliminating transportation pollution, environmentally healthy production practices, or relating in any way to the sustainability of the market
- **‘Build/Strengthen Communities’**: empowered community as the center of local food systems, gathering places of social life, location where valuable connections are formed, neighbors meet neighbors, bonding over shared

interests, all-welcoming and peaceful sites of this type of action, revitalizing dead areas, locational celebrations of community, or strengthening social fabric

- **‘Fun, Social Experience’**: social experience of the market, fun, place to bring family or meet with friends, enjoy the weekend, spaces of intimacy, beloved places, exploratory experience, basket kicking, transgressive place of play, appropriation of rural identity, snapshot of local culture, tourist hub
- **‘Higher Profit Margins’**: relatively expensive luxury, more expensive than grocery store competitors, buying the experience of market, selling aura of personal and social connection, quality of goods being conflated with ideas of locality and context of the market, locally grown is of higher quality, attaching personally meaningful ideologies to products, justifying higher prices, ethical imperatives, buying into lifestyle, cultural capital, or any general assumptions about products
- **‘Sites of Privilege’**: all welcoming sites of privilege, interaction between diverse groups of people, exclusion due to price, preference for hand-made items, invisible non-white populations, privileging certain normative practices, gathering around some vendors, whiteness, American ideal, or white farm imaginary

Responses were coded into one, or in some cases multiple, of these categories.

Limitations

This research project was designed to have an exploratory nature. That being said, the study design was limited in several ways. First, the samples used in this study were non-probability samples of convenience and thus cannot be said to be representative of the actual market population. Additionally, the data collection method of the survey-interview involved a face-to-face interaction that may have influenced the respondents' answers. Thirdly, the coding of the responses into manifest and latent grouping was a subjective measure completed by the researcher without review from a second co-researcher or advisor. Nor were the interviewees asked about the correctness of the codings based on the original meaning of their comments.

I, the researcher, also inevitably brought my own biases and perspectives into the research project. I believe it is important to note that I do support the ideals surrounding farmers' markets in general, as well as believe they play an important role in the community. Some aspects of the market, such as diversity of customers and vendors, do bother me and are one reason I decided to complete this research. Personally I believe that farmers' markets can be used to serve the entire community but that in order to reach that goal, a deeper understanding of the market must be reached through research projects such as this one.

RESULTS

Results of this research will be presented in two ways. First, responses will be separated by theme and examples of each theme will be given to illustrate overall trends in the data. Next, responses will be separated by respondent type, and findings

will be compared and contrasted in order to assess whether perspective has an effect on perceived market function.

Overall Trends

The responses from the survey questions and online surveys were divided into 454 response phrases with an average of 2.5 phrases per response. Table 1 shows the categorized results.

Table 1: Overall Results

Function	# of Responses	% Of Responses
Economic Machine (M)	54	11.9%
Supporting Small Scale Local Farms and Crafts (M)	76	16.7%
Space of Direct Interaction (M)	31	6.8%
Providing Quality Food to the Community (M)	87	19.2%
Environmentalism (M)	16	3.5%
Build/Strengthen Communities (L)	81	17.8%
Fun, Social Experience (L)	59	13.0%
Higher Profit Margins (L)	35	7.7%
Sites of Privilege (L)	9	2.0%
None	41	9.1%
Repeated Responses	36	7.9%
Totals	454	99.8%*

*Total does not add to 100% due to rounding

Across the categories, responses were distributed with no category exceeding 20 percent of the total responses and the lowest categories receiving less than 5 percent of the responses. The manifest functions accounted for 58.1 percent of the responses

while the latent functions accounted for 40.5 percent of the responses. Additionally 7.9 percent of the responses received multiple codings into separate function categories and 9.1 percent of the responses were unable to be categorized. These 9.1 percent did not fit into the predefined function themes and thus were not included in the analysis.

Manifest Functions

The first category of functions was the manifest, or the intended and recognized functions of the market. Of the manifest functions, the function that was most frequently identified was 'Providing Quality Food/Products to the Community'. Around 19 percent (n=87) of the total responses fell into this category. The majority of responses in this category dealt with the market's ability to get fresh food to the Watauga community. For example, one produce vendor stated that the farmers' market meant "getting healthy local food to the community at large". Another first-year vendor pointed out that the market was a "good way to connect food with the customer base". Customers recognized this function as well. One female customer claimed that shopping at the market was a way to "support myself and my loved ones with fresh and healthy food" and another viewed the market as a "wonderful source of fresh, local produce, eggs, and meat".

Other common responses to the market's meaning were intertwined with the products sold there. For instance, some customers felt the market meant, "purchasing fresh, organic foods and local products", as well as "fresher meats, organically-grown vegetables, and homemade breads, jams, and honeys". The most common type of this response, however, was a simple preference for "fresh, local food." Additionally, many

respondents felt that the variety of goods and products at the market was excellent and commented on the freshness of the food and quality of the products. Some customers identified specific items such as tomatoes, coffee, mushrooms, or birdhouses that drew them to the market. One customer couple in their thirties pointed out the importance of the farmers market in food deserts and its role in providing healthy food to the community. Another common response thread dealt with vendors desire to help the community through their participation at the farmers market. One vendor stated, “all [vendors] have a common interest to give back to the community”. Two other vendors mentioned selling at the market even when they didn’t need the money. In short, the most recognized function of the farmers’ market was providing the community service of connecting the local people to quality, local food.

The next manifest function with the most responses was ‘Supporting Small Scale Farms and Crafts’ which accounted for around 17 percent (n=76) of the total responses. For vendors, the farmers’ market was often viewed from an economic angle. Multiple vendors commented that the market was a good source of income as well as provided a place to market their goods. While some vendors used the market sales as an alternate income source, others were more dependent. One such vendor in his eighth-year of selling at the market commented that the market “means I can continue farming and sell my product.” Another vendor in his sixth-year stated that he sells at the market because “my kids are hungry”. Some vendors noticed that the market was an especially prime space to sell due the amount of customers and exposure on market days. One vendor in her second-year liked the market for its “exposure” specifically noting “the amount of customers that come through” and that her product is becoming known

among the regulars. Another vendor claimed that the Watauga County Farmers' Market was the "highest volume market in the area". One first-year vendor viewed the market through its potential as a small business start up location, noting the market was a "low risk way to get into the bakery business".

Some customers also recognized their role in supporting local farmers and craftspeople. For example, one 58-year-old community member said, "I love buying fresh produce and craft from local people" and another valued the ability to "support farmers in the same community as me". One online respondent, in response to a question on personal market meaning stated the market means "the ability to support the livelihoods of people who live here". Another customer added, "It's a great place to find and support local farmers and artists". A final element this response category dealt with was the support that vendors felt from the community, both customers and other vendors alike. One seventh-year vendor stated the market was a "supportive place to be" while another added that at the market there was "a lot of vendors who support each other". Overall, supporting local farmers and craftspeople was both an important and recognized function of the market.

The next manifest function, accounting for approximately 12 percent (n=54) of responses viewed the market as an alternate 'Economic Machine'. To some, this meant the market provided an economic service generally not readily available. One online respondent stated that the purpose of the market was "to provide a direct economic channel between grower and customer". One crafts vendor agreed that the farmers' market was a "good way to showcase local vendors". To other participants, the market was an alternative to other established food sources. One market baker quantified this

sentiment stating, “For 70 percent of the customers, this is their grocery store”. One online customer respondent agreed claiming that their participation in the market meant that they now didn’t have to go to the grocery store. Also common were responses related to the ‘local movement’. One tourist customer respondent saw the market as “an opportunity to buy local”, and another student customer felt that the market meant, “putting money back into the local economy”. Another customer felt the market provided a broader service by promoting appreciation for local commerce. Finally, some market participants recognized the market’s ability to bring visitors and tourists into the community.

The fourth manifest function that accounted for approximately 7 percent (n=31) of the total responses was providing a ‘Space of Direct Interaction’. Many customers and vendors alike recognized the unique ability of the market to personally connect market participants. A couple of vendors said that they enjoyed the interaction with not only customers but the relationships they had developed with other vendors as well. Customers were also found to highlight their relationship with farmers as a common reason for market participation. One online respondent commented about this relationship, “ I love the relationships I have built with the farmers over the years...I love being friends with them on FB [Facebook] and seeing behind the scenes and seeing their children grow”. Another stated that the market is a “wonderful way to get to know... local farmers”. Customers were also found to appreciate the ability to learn about their food. One 63-year-old male customer stated that he liked to “know who’s growing his food” and another 56-year-old female stated that she liked knowing “where the food was grown”.

Some respondents also appreciated the conversations about their food and farming practices that occurred at the market. One produce vendor commented that the market allowed customers to become “involved in their food and what they eat” and another vendor commented that it allowed him to “talk about why I’m doing what I’m doing”. One online respondent voiced similar sentiments stating, “I love knowing exactly where my food comes from and learning about crops that I’ve never seen before”. Finally one customer summarized this market attribute stating that the market was meant to “connect growers with consumers face-to-face and make real the logic of healthy, fresh food”.

The least common manifest function was the ‘Environmentalism’ of the market, which accounted for only 3.5 percent (n=16) of the total responses. Most responses of this kind dealt with the sustainability of the market. One online respondent commented that the market meant supporting sustainable agriculture. Another 21 year-old female student stated, “Boone has taught me... the importance of sustaining a community”. Outside of sustainability, there were few references to the environmentally friendly aspects of the market. One 23 year-old male customer responded that he comes to the market instead of other food sources because it was “less gas”. Overall, environmentalism was not as strong a motivating factor for participation as the other manifest market functions.

Latent Functions

The second category of functions was the latent, or unintended functions of the market. Of the latent functions outlined in the literature, the most common function

was ‘Building/Strengthening Communities’, which accounted for around 18 percent (n=81) of the total responses. There were a number of different views of how or in what ways the farmers’ market provided this function to the community. First, many viewed the farmers’ market as the “community gathering place”. One market vendor of more than 20 years claimed that the market was “Boone’s downtown community square” although Boone has a separate defined downtown area. Another online respondent agreed, asserting that the market was a “meaningful place to come together as a community”. A second online respondent believed the market served to “develop a deeper sense of community”. One female student commented that the market served to bring the community and the university together and added, “[my time at the market] is the only time I feel a part of the community”. Another female student felt the same claiming the market was “one of the only things I do in the community, in Boone, as a student”.

A couple of participants referred to the “fellowship” that the market space provided. One 31 year-old male customer stated that the market just “feels like community”. Some even viewed the market as their “weekly church” or their “second family”. One vendor agreed, adding that “the vendors become like family, we know them and they know us.” One produce vendor stated that being at the market felt like “being at home”. Another crafts vendor said the market provided a “soulful connection to the community”. Other participants recognized the relationship building that occurred at the market week after week. One online respondent replied that the farmers’ market meant forming bonds with community members. Two vendors mentioned the networking aspect of the market. One vendor commented on the

inclusiveness of the market stating that the market was a “representation of the community as a whole, people from every sector including tourists”. To other participants, the market represented an opportunity to meet community members that they couldn’t meet elsewhere. In summary, for many participants the community building aspect of the farmers’ market is a strong draw to the market as well as one of the market’s most impactful community functions.

The second most common latent function, accounting for 13 percent (n=59) of the total responses, was the ‘Fun, Social Experience’ of the market. For many, the farmers’ market has a very strong personal meaning. When asked what the market means to them, many responded “a lot”, or “quite a bit”. One online respondent even dreamt she missed the market and was upset. She explained:

“I look forward to the market every week and once I even had a legitimate nightmare that I missed the market. Thankfully I woke up and it was only Friday!”

Many commented on the market in terms of activities offered. One vendor commented that there is “lots to see and do” and another customer mentioned the “kids corner” as one of their family’s favorite parts. Another crafts vendor commented that she participated in the market because it was “really fun and rewarding”. Another common response from both customer and vendors was that the market was a “weekly ritual” and “a great way to spend a Saturday”. One female 21 year-old student commented that there was “something about the experience” of the market and another online respondent added “I... just really enjoy the atmosphere – going to the farmers’ market first thing Saturday morning has always been a favorite part of the week for me”. Other customers appreciated the market for its social aspect. One 36 year-old female

community member commented that the market was a “place to socialize” and many agreed saying the market was a great place to see friends. One online respondent specified that the market was an “opportunity to catch up with friends and acquaintances each week” and another added “it’s like a weekly ritual where I run into friends and people I know”. Lastly, other participants referred to the entertainment value of the market. Two customers specifically referenced the music present on market days. Another customer viewed the market as a “display of farm culture”. Through these responses, its clear that although the market may serve more serious functions, many participants see it as a place to enjoy themselves and relax, highlighting an important market function that may not receive enough recognition.

The final two latent functions, ‘Higher Profit Margins’ and ‘Sites of Privilege’ were more covert and thus more difficult to code for and separate out. The third latent function category, ‘Higher Profit Margins’, accounted for 8 percent (n=35) of the total responses. Many of the responses in this category dealt with assumptions about the market products based on the context of the market that could lead to higher market prices. For example, one 53 year-old female customer stated the farmers’ market food was of “better quality”. Another 23 year-old male student voiced a similar view stating he came to the market for the “better, fresher food”. One customer added that she knew the produce at the market was fresh and another responded that she “already knows [market products are of] good quality”. Two female students stated that food from the market simply “tastes better” and another community member added that market food was “really delicious”. On the other hand, some customers were not as confident. One student was unsure about the food quality saying that it “hopefully tastes better and is

healthier”. Another 51 year-old community member voiced a similar opinion, stating that although she liked the market as a local food source, she was “not convinced the produce is any better”.

Other responses that could point to a reason for accepting higher market prices vary. For one, some customers commented that the presence of specialty items, or items they couldn’t easily find elsewhere, were a draw to the market. For others, it was the ideals of the market that drew them there. One seasonal resident connected to the ideals of the market stating they related to the farmers and wanted to support their “hard work and entrepreneurship”. The ‘local’ ideal of the market also increased its draw. One online respondent appreciated the market “offering quality, fresh products grown locally” and another agreed adding that market produce was “quality grown locally”. Few respondents actually commented on the market prices. One respondent stated that the food was “not even that expensive” and really the “same price” as alternatives. On the other hand, one vendor did recognize that the higher customer base and style of sale allowed him to feel comfortable raising prices on his products. Overall, although more difficult to identify, responses that indicated an acceptance for higher prices and thus higher profit margins did exist, albeit at a less frequent rate.

The final latent, and least common, market function was the market as a ‘Site of Privilege’. This function was the most difficult category to recognize and accounted for only 2 percent (n=9) of the total responses. Responses indicating that the market could be exclusive for some and inclusive for others varied. One example was the presence and preference for specialty items from multiple customers. Another example was the preference for certain types of foods. One vendor commented that market customers

“actually care about healthy organic vegetables”. Another vendor couple added that they participated in the market because it was “easy”. One customer felt strongly that the market was an inclusive place based on economic position stating that the market was “welcoming of people of all different incomes” and that it was “not even that expensive”. Ideals also played a role in some respondents’ market participation. One female student commented that she “feels more responsible being [at the market]”. Another customer added that they “feel good about supporting local business”. In conclusion, this potential latent function is not strongly supported by responses.

Customer-Vendor Discrepancies

Dividing responses by respondent type allows for comparison between customers and vendors. Of the 454 total responses, 307 were from customers and 147 were from vendors. Table 2 shows the results when separated by respondent type.

Table 2: Customer-Vendor Discrepancies

Function	# of Customer Responses	% of Customer Responses	# of Vendor Responses	% of Vendor Responses
Economic Machine*	47	15.3%	7	4.8%
Supporting Small Scale Local Farms and Crafts*	33	10.7%	43	29.3%
Space of Direct Interaction	17	5.5%	14	9.5%
Providing Quality* Food to the Community	77	25.1%	10	6.8%
Environmentalism	14	4.6%	2	1.4%
Build/Strengthen Communities	48	15.7%	33	22.4%
Fun, Social Experience	38	12.4%	21	14.3%
Higher Profit Margins*	32	10.4%	3	2.0%
Sites of Privilege	7	2.3%	2	1.4%
None	23	7.8%	18	12.2%
Repeated Responses	30	9.8%	6	4.1%

**Denotes values that are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level*

When compared used a Chi-Squared test for significance at the $p < .05$ level, five out of the nine market functions show similar frequency levels for customers and vendors responses and therefore did not display statistically significant differences. These functions include 'Space of Direct Interaction', 'Environmentalism', 'Build/Strengthen Communities', 'Fun, Social Experience' and 'Sites of Privilege'. For these five functions, similar response rates indicate that both groups recognize these specific market functions at similar levels. The remaining four functions show statistically significant differences in response levels.

The first two functions that displayed differences, 'Economic Machine' and 'Supporting Small Scale Farms and Crafts' seem to have related causes. For the first function, 'Economic Machine', 15 percent (n=47) of the total customer responses fell into this category while only 5 percent (n=7) of the total vendors responses fell into this category. For customers, the market represented an obvious connection to the local economy. They felt that their participation had a direct impact on economic aspects of the community and voiced this belief in their responses. For example, customers commented that the market meant "putting money back into local markets" and "keeping our money local" as well as a significant amount of comments related to supporting and buying local. For the few vendors that did acknowledge this market function, their answers were still tied to the more individual economic benefits vendors receive from the market. For example, the most common response was that the market was a good way to showcase local vendors.

For the second function, 'Supporting Small Scale Farms and Crafts', around 11 percent (n=33) of the total customer responses fell into this category while 29 percent of total vendor responses were categorized as such. For vendors, the market meant "more income", "a good place to sell my stuff", and a "great customer base" as well as a "supportive place to be". Customers voiced similar sentiments like "supporting local people" and "supporting local farmers", but were less frequent in doing so.

The third market function that showed a significant difference is 'Providing Quality Food to the Community'. For customers, around 25 percent (n=77) of the total responses fell into this category while only 7 percent (n=10) of the total vendor responses fell into this category. Responses in this category were consistent between

vendors and customers, focusing mainly around the market providing fresh, quality food to the customers and community. Customers, however, were more than 3 times as likely to respond in this way than were vendors.

The final function that displayed a significant difference in response levels was 'Higher Profit Margins' with customers responding at a rate of 10 percent (n=32) and vendors responding at a rate of only 2 percent (n=3). In general, customers were more likely to respond in ways that indicated that higher profit margins exist at the market while vendors were less likely to comment in this way.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the perceived functions of the community market from the perspective of those involved in the market and of the customers who frequent the market. From the literature, nine market functions were drawn including five manifest, or intended market functions, and four latent, or non-intended market functions. As expected, when asked about the functions the farmers' market plays in the community as well as the market meaning, the majority (around 91 percent) of the responses from both customers and vendors aligned with the predefined functions. All nine categories were represented in the responses, some more frequent than others.

The results are more interesting when viewed in their manifest and latent categorizations. By definition, the manifest functions should have received the overwhelming majority of the responses, as the intended and recognized functions of the market. Three of the manifest functions, 'Economic Machine' (12 percent), 'Supporting Small Scale Farms and Crafts' (17 percent), and 'Providing Quality Food to

the Community' (19 percent), were in fact reported at high enough rates to justify their manifest labels. The other two manifest functions, 'Environmentalism' (4 percent) and 'Space of Direct Interaction' (7 percent), were not.

On the other hand, the latent functions by definition should not have received a large amount of responses due to their unintended and unrecognized nature. This was true for two of the four, 'Higher Profit Margins' (8 percent) and 'Sites of Privilege' (2 percent) which received lower responses rates. The other two latent functions, 'Build/Strengthen Community' (18 percent) and 'Fun, Social Experience' (13 percent) received much higher levels of response. This would be surprising, however both of these functions were labeled latent only from the perspective of the market. From the perspective of the customer, these functions were in fact manifest, which may serve to explain their high response rates.

Differentiating responses by respondent type, however, yields other interesting results. For four of the nine functions, there was a significant difference in the response rates of the customers compared to the response rates of the vendors. This divide indicates that the market may have a different meaning depending on one's perspective. The first function with a significant difference was 'Economic Machine'. The expected results were that the vendors would view the market as more of a community economic machine than would the customers. In reality, these views were reversed. Customers were over three times more likely to view the market in this way than were vendors. Relatedly, for 'Supporting Small Scale Farms and Crafts', which also posted a significant difference in response rates, the expected outcome was that customers would be more likely to view the market as an avenue to support local people. Data suggested that the

opposite was true, that vendors were almost three times as likely to view the market in this function than customers were. When taken together, these results indicate a predictable outcome: vendors are more likely to participate in the farmers' market for personal financial reasons such as continued livelihood, whereas customers are more likely to participate in the market not for the personal benefits, but for the communal market benefits.

Another interesting result was the third function, 'Provide Quality Food to the Community', that posted a statistically significant difference in response rates. The expected outcome was that the vendors would view this function as a main market function, and respond so at higher rates. In reality, vendors only responded in this way in 7 percent of their responses, a surprisingly low rate. On the other hand, one quarter of the customer's responses fell into this category. This discrepancy is puzzling. Perhaps for vendors this function was too obvious to warrant a response whereas customers were more willing to state the obvious. Regardless, these phenomena merit further examination.

The fourth statistically significant function, 'Higher Profit Margins' is more difficult to evaluate. As a truly latent function, it posed a more complicated case to code, and thus low response rates may not be indicative of a noteworthy result. In any case, results show that customers gave more responses that indicated their recognition of the potential for higher profit margins at the market than vendors. Lower vendor response rates could indicate that in fact higher profit margins do not occur at the market, or higher customer rates could indicate customers' underlying belief that higher profit margins do exist. Examining the market prices and comparing them to competing

venues prices was out of the scope of this project, but could provide enlightening insights into this issue through future research.

The final two functions that presented unexpected results were the two latent functions, 'Fun, Social Experience' and 'Build/Strengthen Community'. These two functions were expected to score highly (12 and 16 percent respectively) in customer responses representing a major market draw for customers. What was unexpected was that these market functions would receive even higher scores (14 and 22 percent respectively) from the vendors. From these results, it is clear that the market means more than buying and selling or spending and earning. Customers and vendors alike recognize that the market represents a unique opportunity for community interaction. For many, this community aspect of the market is the most important function it serves.

It is this community aspect that poses one final important area of discussion. As stated, the 'Build/Strengthen Community' function was one of the most frequently responded categories, second highest response category for both customers and vendors. Many involved in the market commented on the strength of the community, some even on how it resembled a family or a church. One customer even responded that the market was an all-inclusive place where all were welcome. Apart from this one response, however, no other responses commented on the type of the community formed at the market. Also absent from all responses is any reference to diversity at the market. These two results open the door to an important issue that may easily be overlooked when studying farmers' markets and similar food systems. It's clear that for many involved the market represents a community of sorts. But what type of

community is formed at the market? Is this community representative of the larger surrounding community or does it only represent a subset?

Examining the demographics of the customer and vendor sample is a good starting point for answering these questions. The literature suggested that farmers' markets tend to serve a fairly homogenous population, specifically white, middle to upper class, and educated. The Watauga County Farmers' Market was startlingly similar. Of the 30 customers interviewed, 97 percent (n=29), all but one, identified as white. Vendor racial demographics were comparable. Of the 20 non-student customers, 75 percent (n= 15) reported a yearly household income of at least \$60,000 with 66 percent of these (n=10) reporting an income of over \$100,000. Additionally, 100 percent (n=30) of the customers reported having at least some college education. Although this sample cannot be considered a representative sample due to the sampling method, it seems that this market does indeed serve a white, educated, higher class demographic.

In examining the community aspect of this market, it may be more important to identify not whom the market serves, but whom the market does not serve. If the demographic of the surrounding area was similar to the demographic served at the market, then it could be argued that the market builds a representative community. The reality is that these figures do not align. The United States Census Bureau (2015) reports the following demographic facts for Watauga County: 95.3 percent white, 1.9 percent black, 3.5 percent Hispanic or Latino, 37.9 percent have a bachelors degree or higher, average household income of \$34,293, and 31% of persons below the poverty line. First, although the racial figures do seem to align with market demographics, both

members of the black community, specifically from the historically black Junaluska area, and Hispanic and Latino persons, of whom the majority moved to the area for agricultural work, were almost completely absent from the farmers' market. Second, with only 38 percent of the county residents possessing a college degree, the market is clearly pulling a more educated clientele and not catering to less educated citizens which form the majority of the population. Third, with a county average household income of around \$35,000, the market is clearly drawing the county's wealthier residents and not equally serving the poorer, lower class residents.

Taking all of this into account, it seems that the farmers' market, and the community formed by it, is not representative of the larger surrounding population. The farmers' market is undeniably building community, but this community seems to be made up of a local 'food elite', with higher earning, higher educated citizens at its base. Additionally it is clear that there is both a class and race discrepancy in market participation, and some groups may be more drawn to as well as inadvertently privileged at the market while other group's participation may be impaired. I do not believe that this is by design, but rather that those involved in the market actually desire a more diverse and larger population to participate in the market. Unfortunately, this is not the current case.

CONCLUSION

Farmers' markets mean different things to different people. In Watauga County, the farmers' market is undoubtedly a beloved place built on a rich food heritage. It is clear that the market and the functions it serves in the community are complicated, and

identifying the most important functions it serves is not easy. To those involved in the market, especially the vendors, the market represents an opportunity to support oneself, to make a living, and to support others in their own pursuit to do the same. To the market customers who spend their time and money at the market, the market represents more of a service to the community; a place to give back. To all involved the market is a place to find and build community as well as a place to enjoy time with family and friends. The community present at the market, however, is not representative of the larger surrounding community. The Watauga County Farmers' Market was found to serve a higher educated, wealthier, whiter population while the majority of the county's residents are of lower class, lower income, and different races were found not to participate in the market at high levels. This conclusion takes on an even greater meaning when coupled with the fact that those impoverished groups, noting the 31 percent poverty level in Watauga County, are the most likely to suffer from food insecurity. Finally, future research on this topic is needed to explore why farmers' markets are inclusive to some parts of the population and exclusive to others.

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Appendix A: Customer Survey Instrument



Watauga County Farmers Market

Horn in the West
Boone, NC 28607

Customer Survey

Please take a moment to help us improve your experience at Watauga County Farmers Market.

What is your sex?

What is your age?

What is your race?

- ☐ White
☐ Black
☐ Hispanic
☐ Asian
☐ Other

Where do you live?

- ☐ Boone
☐ Blowing Rock
☐ Banner Elk
☐ Linville
☐ Other _____

What is your average yearly household income?

- ☐ <\$23,000
☐ \$23,001-\$60,000
☐ \$60,001- \$100,000
☐ \$100,001-\$150,000
☐ >\$150,000

What is your position in the community?

- ☐ Community Member
☐ Student
☐ Tourist
☐ Seasonal Resident

What was the last educational level you completed?

- ☐ Pre High School
☐ High School
☐ Some College/ Undergraduate
☐ Post-Graduate

How do you feel about Saturday market hours (currently 8-12pm)?

- ☐ Keep the hours the same
☐ Extend hours to 1pm
☐ Extend the hours to 2pm

Would you attend a weekday market? Explain. If yes, what time would you most likely be able to attend?

- ☐ Yes, morning (8-12am) _____
☐ Yes, afternoon (1-4pm) _____
☐ Yes, evening (4-7pm) _____
☐ No _____
☐ Maybe _____

What does the market mean to you?

Why do you come to the market? Instead of other competitors (grocery stores, local farms, etc.)?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B: Vendor Survey Instrument



Watauga County Farmers Market

Horn in the West
Boone, NC 28607

Vendor Survey

Please take a moment to help us improve your experience at Watauga County Farmers Market.

How long have you been selling at the Market?

- ☐ 1-3 years
☐ 4-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16-25 years
☐ 26+ years

How far do you travel to sell at the Market?

- ☐ 0-10 miles
☐ 11-30 miles
☐ 31-60 miles
☐ >60 miles

For the most part, do you sell your entire product?

- ☐ No, not even close
☐ No, but a good amount
☐ Yes, with just a small amount left
☐ Yes, all of it
☐ Other _____

How satisfied are you with your profits earned at the market?

- ☐ Very satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Somewhat satisfied
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

On average, what percentage of your annual income comes market sales?

- ☐ 0-20%
☐ 21-40%
☐ 41-60%
☐ 61-80%
☐ 81-100%

In comparison to this date in 2013, have your sales in 2014...

- ☐ Increased
☐ Decreased
☐ Stayed the same

Would you be interested in selling at weeknight market possibly at another location?

- ☐ No, Saturdays are enough
☐ No, I not sure it would be worth the drive
☐ Maybe, depends on the location
☐ Yes, absolutely
☐ Other _____

Follow Up 1←: If it were found that there existed a supportive customer base for a weekday market, would your answer change?

- ☐ No, probably not
☐ Yes, I would consider it
☐ Other _____

Follow Up 2←: Which would you prefer for the weekday location?

- ☐ Horn in the West
☐ Downtown

What does the market mean to you?

Why do you choose to sell at the market?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C: Consent Form



Information to Consider about this Research

Demographic and Value Based Market Research at the Watauga Farmers Market

Principal Investigator: Nicholas Smith

Department: Sociology

Contact Information: Nicholas Smith (919) 624-5765, smithnj2@appstate.edu
Dr. Cameron Lippard- lippardcd@appstate.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study about improving the vendor and customer experience at the Watauga County Farmers Market. Collected data will serve to better shape current policy, organization, and advertising efforts in hope of improving and growing the Market.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to answer questions about your personal opinions on issues related to the market as well as answer personal demographic questions such as sex, income, residential status, etc.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any survey question for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Nicholas Smith and/or Dr. Cameron Lippard.

The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix D: Executive Summary

The purpose of this research project was to examine the role(s) that farmers' markets play in a community, specifically focusing on the Watauga County Farmers' Market in Boone, North Carolina. Research data was collected during the 2014 market season, from six market visits throughout the months of September, October, and November. Data collection methods included participant observation, short in-person survey/interviews, and an online customer survey, with the majority of the data coming from the survey/interviews.

The in-person survey/interviews were conducted with a total of 60 market participants, 30 customers and 30 vendors, and took on average 5 minutes to complete. In the customer survey, customers were asked demographic questions as well as two open-ended questions on the meaning of the market and why they chose to attend the market. In the vendor survey, vendors were asked questions about the history and experience with the market, as well as asked similar open-ended questions on the meaning of the market and why they chose to sell there. By request of the researcher, two open-ended questions were added to the online survey asking similar questions about personal market meaning and purpose of the market in the community.

This research project yielded several interesting results. First, the data suggested that the market served different purposes for the vendors than for the customers. Vendors were found to view the market as a way to make a living and a great place to sell their products while customers were more likely to view the market as a community economic machine and a place to buy quality products for themselves

and their families. This incongruity is important when attempting to understand reasons for market participation for both groups, but nonetheless is an expected result.

The second interesting result involves the view of the market as a fun, social experience and as well as a site of community building. As expected, customers were found to view the market in this way at high levels commenting on the market activities, friendships they had developed at the market, and how through their participation they felt a part of the community. Surprisingly, vendors were even more likely to view the market in this way frequently commenting on the community support they felt from not only the customers but from other vendors. Through these two findings it is clear that the market serves broader purposes than solely serving as an economic market. For many, the local farmers' market is a beloved place: a place to enjoy a Saturday morning, to make friends, spend time with family, buy quality products, and strengthen community.

It is this community aspect of the market that introduces the third noteworthy result of this research. In all the responses highlighting this community aspect of the market, there were very few that described the type of community present at the market. On top of this, not a single response mentioned any market diversity. When examining the demographic data of the customers, it seems that this is because there is in fact not much diversity at the market, especially in the customers. Of the 30 customers surveyed, all but one were white, all had some college education, and 75% reported a household income of at least \$60,000 with two-thirds of these reporting a household income of over \$100,000. Although demographics were not collected for vendors, similar statistics are expected (especially dealing with race).

While this sample cannot be considered representative of the larger market demographic, it seems that the market does serve a whiter, higher educated, and middle to upper class demographic. In comparison, Watauga County, albeit 95% white, is home to a black Junaluska community as well as a growing Hispanic population, has an average household income of \$34,000 with 31% of persons below the poverty line, and has only 38% of its citizens holding a college degree. When both of these statistic lines are examined together, it is clear that the market is serving a smaller, more educated and wealthier subset of the surrounding community while the majority of the poorer less educated citizens are seeking other means for their foods and goods.

I do not believe the market is inclusive to some and exclusive to others by design. There are many complicated reasons that could together serve to explain the demographic present at the market as well as the demographic not present at the market. That being said, I do strongly believe that the market has the potential to serve as an all-inclusive site providing healthy food at a good price to all members of the county. Below is a list of a few policy suggestions that could aid in realizing this larger market goal.

Policy Suggestions

- *Increase advertisements for EBT, SNAP, WIC, and SFMNP, especially in areas where these benefits are most needed.* It may be the case that eligible community members are not aware of the existence of these programs at the market and increased advertisement could start the word-of-mouth chain leading to larger participation and utilization of these programs.

- *Develop a more extensive transportation system during market hours.* For some community members, it may be difficult to attend the market if there is not an easy method of transportation. The easiest way to develop this would be to partner with the Appalcart in hopes of increasing the number and frequency of routes that stop at Horn in the West. If this is not possible, shuttles from nearby stops could provide a service of transporting customers to and from the market. Once developed, advertising these services would be key in their successful implementation.
- *Seek a diverse vendor and product base.* Making a special effort to reach out to other small-scale food sources could result in a more diverse market vendor demographic. A more diverse vendor group could lead to a more diverse customer group, as customers of different cultures are able to purchase more culturally relevant products. Services to aid in application to be a vendor as well as assistance in market practices would help in this area.
- *Establish an offseason farmers' market.* While the summer market may be the most appropriate time to be open due to growing seasons and location availability, it also may end up catering to tourists and seasonal residents that do not represent the larger surrounding area. While this is a not a negative aspect of the market, establishing an offseason market could allow for a greater connection to the community that remains during the colder months and who is still in need of quality goods.
- *Offer a secondary market day/time.* While Saturday morning market hours may work for those who work Monday through Friday, they may not work for those

who work weekends or do not have child caretaking options on Saturdays.

Offering secondary market hours at a different day, preferably a weekday, and time would provide a second option that may fit better into other community members' schedules.